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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 110800Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2556
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2619
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3886

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WHITE HOUSE/NSC/NEC; JUSTICE FOR STU CHEMTOB IN ANTI-TRUST DIVISION;
TREASURY/OASIA/IMI/JAPAN; DEPT PASS USTR/PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE;
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FAS/ITP FOR SCHROETER; PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR;
CINCPAC FLT/PA/ COMNAVFORJAPAN/PA.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 04/11/07

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(1) National referendum bill likely to clear Diet during current session; Government, ruling coalition confirm plan to pass legislation through Lower House on April 13

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 10, 2007

With the end of the first half of the unified local elections, the government and ruling parties yesterday started the selection of priority bills that will be submitted to the current session of the Diet. The government and ruling coalition also confirmed that the Lower House Special Commission on the Constitution would adopt on April 12 a bill outlining procedures for amending the Constitution and pass it through the Lower House on April 13. As it stands, chances are that the legislation will clear the Diet during the ongoing session. They plan to set up a special committee in the Lower House to deliberate a set of three bills on education reform and to speed up deliberations in the committee next week or later.

In a meeting yesterday of the government and ruling camp, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Toshihiro Nikai explained the procedure of taking a vote on the national referendum bill, saying:

"We will reach a crucial point this week. Since we spent enough time for deliberations on the national referendum bill, we are now ready to put the bill to a vote. More than 540 hours has been spent on debate, including that in the Research Commission before the special commission was set up."

Nikai underscored that criticism by Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), which has called for deliberating the measure carefully, was unwarranted.

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The ruling parties have attached importance to bills with a strong conservative bent that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is eager to pass through the Diet during the current Diet session. Coordination is underway for naming former Education Minister Kosuke Hori chairman of the special committee on the three bills for educational reform. The ruling camp has a blueprint for passing the three bills thorough the Lower House in the middle of May. They intend to have the Upper House Committee on Education, Culture and Science discuss the legislation and adopt it in early June. Regarding social-security-related bills, they also aim to start in mid-April deliberations on a bill to reform the Social Insurance Agency.

Since the start of debate on a bill revising the employment rules, including a plan to raise the minimum wage, has been delayed, some in the ruling camp are concerned that the measure may not clear the Diet during the ongoing session. The Lower House is now discussing a special measures law designed to set up a new subsidy system for municipalities cooperating with the government plan to relocate US bases in Japan with the aim of passing the bill through the Lower House in mid-April. The outlook is that a bill revising the Iraq Special Measures Law will clear the Lower House in mid-May or later.

The ruling bloc will put off until an extraordinary Diet session this fall or later passage of bills to set up a Japanese version of the US National Security Council and a bill merging the employees' pension program and the mutual aid pension scheme.

In yesterday's meeting of the government and the ruling coalition, Abe stressed the need to strengthen the party's support system for the April 22 Upper House by-elections in Fukushima and Okinawa Prefectures. In the first half of the unified local elections, the LDP won three of the five gubernatorial races in which it faced off with Minshuto. The number of seats the LDP obtained in the 44 prefectural assembly elections was about 100 fewer than it gained in the 2003 elections. This indicates that the party's local chapters have weakened.

Since the results of the Upper House by-elections will directly affect the setting of the threshold for victory in the July Upper

House race, the LDP leadership will send senior members to Okinawa and Fukushima. The ruling camp aims to maintain its majority in the Upper House. If the ruling coalition wins the two by-elections, it will have to win 63 seats in the July Upper House election to do so. If it loses the two races, it must win 65, making the road to victory a difficult one.

(2) Defense Ministry eyes "logistics agency" after disbanding DFAA

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
April 11, 2007

A plan is afoot to relocate the Logistics Departments in the Ground, Maritime, and Air Staff Offices, which procure weaponry and ammunition for the Self-Defense Forces, to the building now housing the Defense Facilities Administration Agency (DFAA) when the agency is disbanded in September this year. The plan is drawing criticism from uniformed officers saying that it would obstruct their operations. Behind the relocation plan lies a scheme to establish a "defense logistics agency" overseeing those logistics departments in separate buildings. It might be just another case of bureaucrats' modus operandi of producing a bigger organization after dismantling

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one body.

The Defense Ministry sits in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo. The Ground Staff Office occupies five floors from the first floor in 19-story Building A, the Maritime Staff Office from the 6th to 9th floors, the ministry's internal bureaus from the 10th to 13th, and the Air Staff Office from the 15th to 19th.

According to the relocation plan, when the DFAA, now in Building D, is dismantled, the DFAA Facilities Department will move from the 4th floor in Building D to Building A and the vacated space will be filled by the Logistics Departments in the three staff offices. A senior Defense Ministry official took this view: "The dismantlement of the DFAA will increase the number of internal bureau personnel by about 500, so some people must move out of the building."

One SDF officer said disapprovingly: "There are important departments on the floors above and below each staff office in the building. In particular, the operations and plans department, which works out defense and budgetary plans, and the logistics department are inseparable."

For instance, the Air Staff Office Defense Plans and Operations Department exists a floor above the Air Staff Office Logistics Department in Building A. Once the Logistics Department is moved to Building D, traveling time would increase.

A Defense Ministry source explained: "We are fully aware of strong objections from the uniformed officers. Defense Ministry leaders have a plan to establish a "defense logistics agency" by putting together three types of departments: a logistics and facilities office to be established in Building D by realigning the DFAA Construction Department, the Technical Research and Development Institute that develops weapons, and the logistics department in each staff office.

Once the defense logistics agency is established, it is certain to press the defense industry hard to accept many retiring bureaucrats. This might help the Defense Ministry's bureaucracy reestablish channels to the construction industry, which the DFAA has lost due to bureaucrat-initiated bid-rigging scandals last year.

The source also noted: "Banks, non-life and life insurance companies are about the only firms that accept retiring senior internal bureau officials. Over 10 career-track bureaucrats join the Defense Ministry annually, and new posts and postretirement jobs are in need."

The approach of disbanding one organization only to establish a similar, larger body in years later has been proven successful. One such example is the Central Procurement Office (CPO) that had been dismantled over a breach of trust scandal but revived as an enhanced

office five and a half years later.

A senior SDF officer lamented: "The revival of the CPO did not draw much criticism. Defense leaders have come up with the idea of dismantling the DFAA as a tool to upgrade the Defense Agency to a ministry rather than from self-reflection. Some of the Defense Ministry's bureaucrats think they can do anything." They put ministry interests ahead of Japan's national interests.

(3) Interview with Syrian Foreign Minister Muallem: Syria hopes for expanded dialogue with US

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NIHON KEIZAI (Page 8) (Full)
April 11, 2007

In an interview with a Nihon Keizai reporter yesterday, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem expressed his hope that United States Speaker of the House Pelosi's visit to Syria will lead to expanding dialogue between Syria and the US. He reiterated the need for the US to specify when it plans to withdraw from Iraq and for Iraq to form a full-scale national defense force by reinforcing its current military.

-- The White House strongly opposed the speaker's visit to Syria, didn't it?

Speaker Pelosi's visit will open the way for Syria to launch a dialogue with the US Congress. The Bush administration's policy of isolating Syria since 2003 is wrong. Syria, adjacent to Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, all of which have conflicts, can become an important player. We are ready to offer cooperation in stabilizing Iraq.

-- What measures do you think will work effectively to stabilize Iraq?

All parties concerned in Iraq, including Baathists, should be allowed to take part in the political process. The US should clarify when it plans to pull its troops out of Iraq, and Iraq should form a heavily armed military to replace it. I think that should big-name Iraqi politicians courageously dismantle the armed groups under their control and discuss with group members how to incorporate them in the military, Iraq will be stabilized.

-- In the upcoming foreign ministerial meeting next month to discuss measures to stabilize Iraq, do you have a plan to meet US Secretary of State Rice individually?

I have no intention of making the proposal to Secretary Rice. Even if we meet under the current situation, we will just exchange our own views and nothing more will come of it. We live in the Middle East, so we know more about the circumstances there than the US. If the other side has no interest in listening to us, the talks will never be constructive.

-- What strategy do you have in mind to resume peace negotiations with Israel?

We are ready to hold negotiations based on the comprehensive peace plan (adopted by the Arab League in late March). We want to secure the return of the Golan Heights, and this is Syria's top priority challenge. Should Israel withdraw to its 1967 borders, it will be possible for both sides to conclude a security accord acceptable to both and establish a normal relationship

The problem of Palestinian refugees should be resolved through negotiations. Nobody can deny the fact that all refugees have the right of return, but the focus of attention is how they use the right.

(4) Shiten (personal view) column: Thorough investigation necessary for settling comfort women issue

ASAHI (Page 18) (Abridged slightly)

April 10, 2007

Koken Tsuchiya, former president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations

The government and the Liberal Democratic Party are showing excessive reactions to the US House of Representatives resolution on the so-called wartime comfort women. There is nothing new about the US resolution, which is similar in contents to those adopted in South Korea and Taiwan that called for Japan's clear apology and response. Japan has repeatedly been urged by the UN Human Rights Commission, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and an International Labor Organization expert council to settle the issue.

Neither the victimized countries nor the international organizations regard the comfort women issue as settled.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Foreign Minister Taro Aso denied "coercion in the narrow sense," pointing out factual mistakes. Their justification is unsound. The governments of victimized countries, such as the Netherlands and South Korea, have identified victims as a result of conducting investigations, including interviews, since 1993. I have interviewed victims from various countries myself. As a result, I have found that in many cases in occupied countries, such as China and the Philippines, the Imperial Japanese Army directly abducted, raped, and confined young women (in comfort stations) without the involvement of the private sector. The Japan Federation of Bar Associations has sent fact-finding teams to those countries, released their investigative reports, and urged the prime minister on four occasions to offer apologies and compensations to the victims.

Some experts attribute the ongoing feud to ambiguity associated with the investigative report and the statement released in 1993 by the government and then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, respectively. I agree with their view. There is no evidence that the government has conducted serious investigations since 1993. The government's response has been passive, evidenced by its lack of efforts to conduct interviews with victims except for those in South Korea. Some have begun calling for a revocation of the Kono statement by taking advantage of its insufficiency. The cause lies in the government's failure to take appropriate steps. The government must repeatedly conduct interviews to elucidate the Japanese military's use of coercion in recruiting the comfort women during World War II.

Past prime ministers have offered apologies. But never has the prime minister or foreign minister met the victims in person. Their Diet replies suggest that they have read neither the Dutch government's investigative reports in or after 1993 nor Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer's reports on the comfort women on Buru Island.

Speculation not based on thorough investigation is unconvincing. The logic to rule out the use of coercion on the grounds of the absence of government documents pointing to coercion is absurd. Although it is a fact that voluminous documents were burned when Japan was defeated in the war, government warehouses still keep large volumes of documents.

A draft bill to establish a special bureau in the National Diet Library to examine those documents has repeatedly been submitted to

the Diet. The Diet must deliberate such a bill before making moves to block the US Congress from adopting the comfort women resolution.

Some are wary the resolution could cause a split in the Japan-US alliance. Any attempt to block the resolution would undermine bilateral relations of trust. Rep. Mike Honda, a cosponsor of the

comfort women resolution, indicated that Japan's awareness of its responsibility would result in reconciliation with the victims and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although the Asian Women's Fund was dissolved last month, many victimized countries and victims held negative views on it, deeming it as a system to evade state responsibility. It is about time that Japan contemplated what "national interests" really means.

(5) WTO talks: Japan alarmed about being left out of context; Government unable to make move on agriculture; Japan likely to be pressed to make concessions, if developing countries, US and EU reach agreement

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 5) (Slightly abridged)
April 10, 2007

Moves to find a breakthrough in the stalemated multilateral trade talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO) are underway behind closed doors. That is because the US president's trade promotion authority (TPA) given by the Congress expires on July 1. The government is frantic about collecting information, alarmed about the possibility of the US and the European Union reaching a compromise on a major reduction of tariffs on agricultural products.

The government in early March received an e-mail from an official responsible for WTO talks in Geneva noting that the US, the EU, Brazil and India appear to plan to hold an urgent ministerial meeting. Japan was quick to collect information by arranging for Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari and Agriculture Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka to hold talks with Indian Prime Minister Kamal Nath and United States Trade Representative Susan Schwab.

The government has a bitter experience in Cancun, Mexico in 2003, where the US and the EU reached agreement ahead of a WTO ministerial to introduce a cap on tariff rates with a view to liberalizing agricultural products. Japan, which was strongly against the idea of capping tariff rates out of consideration to domestic farmers, found that it was left out of the context.

The proposal made by the US and the EU was rejected as it faced opposition from agricultural countries, which were seeking major concessions in the agricultural area. This time Brazil is acting as a mediator for developing countries and approaching the US and Europe, which have hinted at adopting preferential measures for developing countries. Japan has a growing sense of crisis, with one government official saying: "If the US and the EU reach a consensus, the talks will wrap up as they intended. Should that occur, Japan might be pressed to make major concessions, including accepting a cap on tariff rates."

Upon receiving information that the US, the EU, Brazil and India would hold a ministerial meeting from Apr. 12 without Japan, Vice Agriculture Minister Yoshio Kobayashi indignantly told a press

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conference, "It is regrettable to hold discussions in which Japan cannot take part."

Japan's position is that it cannot accept any major reduction of tariffs on produce, such as rice. Other countries are actively exploring agreements through talks, while Japan finds it difficult to make a move due to the agricultural issue.

There are signs indicating the possibility of the talks going on at a high pitch. EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson stressed during telephone talks with Matsuoka, "We will aim at reaching an agreement in general principle." He is eyeballing the US president's TPA expiring.

One government official presumes that the talks would climax in April, expecting to see some progress in April if they aim at reaching a consensus at the end of June. This view is gaining ground within the government. Amari and Matsuoka plan to hold talks in

India with US and European ministers after the G-4 ministerial on the 12th.

If such a climax really comes, the government's policy decision, including opening up Japan's agricultural market, will be put to the test.

(6) Editorial -- An "ice-thawing trip" by Wen: Substance needed instead of language

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 11, 2007

Does Wen Jiabao want to melt the "ice" lying between Japan and China with "wen" (this Chinese letter means warm)? China's Premier Wen Jiabao will arrive in Japan this afternoon and stay here until April 13. Wen will be the first Chinese premier to visit Japan in nearly seven years, but his visit to Japan this time will be his second one. At a press conference ahead of his tour of Japan, Wen noted: "Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to China last year was an 'ice-breaking trip.' My visit to Japan this time will be an 'ice-thawing trip.'"

This remark is viewed as showing his enthusiasm to improve Japan-China ties, which had been in an ice age until last year. We welcome his stance. But it is not so easy for the Japanese public to dispel their distrust of the Chinese government caused by China's anti-Japanese attitude that has intensified particularly since the start of the 1990s.

For the real improvement of relations, thawing, and mutual trust, not only language but substance is also essential. We want to see how China has changed its policy toward Japan in concrete terms.

Many Japanese never forget that the past buzzword "Japan-China friendship" was simply used by China as a "friendship convenient only to itself." Many Japanese also never forget that China's stance toward Japan could easily change, depending on its domestic political climate and its Communist Party's policy switch.

During Prime Minister Abe's visit to Beijing last October, both Japan and China agreed to build a strategic, reciprocal relationship. Now, the two countries intend to bring it into shape and deepen it during Wen's visit to Japan this time.

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In the political and security areas, both sides are expected to agree to push ahead with mutual visits by their top leaders. Japan has claimed since former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was still in office: "The top leaders of the two countries must meet all the more because there are problems." We welcome mutual visits to each other by the top leaders of the two countries taking root. Defense exchanges, including a visit to Japan by the Chinese defense minister, would also be of help for confidence-building.

In the economic area, a Japan-China high-level economic dialogue will be arranged. This is a Japan-China version of the strategic economic ministerial conference, which was started between the United States and China and between China and Russia. Specifically, Japan and China will work together to chart specific steps for energy-saving and environmental preservation. In addition, the two countries boost cooperation in such sectors as information technology (IT), finance, and small businesses.

Yet, we must keep it in mind that Japan-China relations should be "reciprocal." Any relationship benefiting only one side is never acceptable. We want to see "reciprocal" measures shown in dealing with the natural resources issue in the East China Sea. We also hope to see both sides frankly assert their own positions respectively about historical perceptions and the Taiwan issue but refrain from using them for political purposes.

(7) Editorial: Japan must take strategic steps for bringing stability to Iraq

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
April 10, 2007

Supporting Iraq and strengthening relations with that country are strategically vital for Japan.

In their meeting yesterday, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki affirmed a plan to build a long-term strategic partnership between the two countries.

Abe conveyed to Maliki Japan's plan to revise the Iraq Reconstruction Support Special Measures Law to extend the Air Self-Defense Force's airlift operations in Iraq for another two years. In response, Maliki expressed his gratitude.

Given Iraq's highly unstable situation, there are limits to what Japan can do to break the impasse in that country. ASDF activities are a symbol of Japan's assistance to Iraq as a responsible member of the international community.

ASDF activities are playing only a minor role in bringing stability to Iraq. Still, it would be extremely significant for Iraq to remember Japan as a country that has extended a helping hand in its time of need.

Iraq has not ranked among the top 10 crude oil producers due to its old facilities despite the fact it has the world's third-largest oil reserves. Chances are high that Iraq's oil output will dramatically increase once its domestic situation becomes stable and its reconstruction efforts get on track.

The stability of the Middle East and relations with Iraq are directly linked to the national interests of Japan, which imports 90% of its crude oil from the Middle East.

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With no prospects for law and order in Iraq in sight, the long-term strategic partnership plan might end up as pie in the sky.

In fact, the government's evacuation advisory to Japanese citizens in Iraq has been preventing Japan from sending personnel to that country to implement the 5-billion-dollar official development assistance (ODA) package.

But Japan must steadily take necessary steps from a long-term strategic perspective.

Not only Japan but also Western countries have strong interests in Iraq's oil. Japan must remain highly alert so as not to fall behind other countries.

There are moves to create a framework to promote regional dialogue for the stabilization of Iraq. One example is the recent international conference held by 16 countries and organizations, including Iraq, its neighboring countries, and the five UN Security Council members, to discuss Iraq's stability.

Japan must actively take part in such a framework.

Prime Minister Abe is scheduled to visit five Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt, following his trip to the United States in late April. Japan must urge the international community to advance dialogue for bringing stability to the Middle East.

(8) Editorial: Measures to address global warming; World beginning to move forward

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
April 10, 2007

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II said that no one on earth could avoid the impact of global warming. The global position on global warming is now quickly changing.

The report compiled by the Working Group II categorically noted that the progress of global warming as a result of human behavior is already having a visible effect on nature and human beings on a global scale.

It also noted that if the average temperature rises 2 to 3 degrees centigrade over 1990 levels, economic losses would increase all over the world.

Facing frequent abnormal climatic events, the world is beginning to move forward. Climate change will reportedly head the agenda of the United Nations Security Council and the G-8 Summit.

The US, the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter, pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol six years ago. The pact sets signatory countries' commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions. However, the US Supreme Court handed down a decision strengthening restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions, judging that greenhouse effect gases emitted by autos, etc., are apparently pollutants. Leading retailers, such as Wal-Mart Stores, are shifting to simple wrapping and energy-conservation at their outlets.

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Though the Kyoto Protocol does not obligate China to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the country has indicated that it will press ahead with reductions in such gases in the post-Kyoto framework to be launched in 2013. Efforts to consolidate the environment for both countries to return to the framework or take part in the pact appear to be underway.

The European Union is ahead of other countries in terms of a global warming preventive strategy. Chancellor Merkel of Germany, which hosted the EU summit meeting held early last month, indicated a strong desire to lead the world regarding global warming preventive measures, issuing an ambitious declaration pledging that the EU as a whole will cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2020 over 1990 levels, or at least by 20% in any case. She added that a method that will not harm economic development would be adopted.

Global interests are not the only issue to which the EU is paying heed. Another ambition must be to seize the initiative in the environmental market, which is bound to grow sharply, by outpacing rivals through such economic strategies as innovation in energy-conserving technology and emissions trading.

At the turning point of the global situation over measures to prevent global warming, Japan's effort to cut greenhouse gas emissions appears to be stagnated in both the industrial and household sectors.

The first thing for Japan to do in order to avoid being left behind is to strengthen preventive measures in those sectors and make sure that it meets its commitment made under the Kyoto Protocol starting next year. In addition, it should pursue policies that will lead to economic development, while involving small and medium-size companies and working people.

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